

Report on the Design Thinking Training Dash

14th Africa Ministerial Cooperative Conference (AMCCO)

Venue: Safari Park Hotel, Nairobi

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Organized by: International Cooperative Alliance – Africa (ICA-A)

1. Background

During the 14th Africa Ministerial Cooperative Conference (AMCCO), a Design Thinking session was held in the afternoon to engage cooperative leaders and partners from across the continent. The session aimed to expose participants to human-centered approaches to problem-solving and explore how Design Thinking can help cooperatives strengthen their competitiveness in a rapidly evolving environment.

2. Objective

To introduce Design Thinking as both a **tool and a mindset** that enables cooperatives to co-create innovative solutions with their members and stakeholders. The guiding challenge for the session was: **“How might we make our cooperatives more competitive?”**

3. Approach and Methodology

Rather than a traditional panel discussion, the facilitation team adopted an experiential **Design Dash** format condensed, hands-on version of the Design Thinking process.

Participants were divided into 20 diverse groups, bringing together representatives from countries including Ethiopia, Nigeria, Kenya, and others. Each group worked collaboratively through the stages of:

1. **Empathize** – identifying member and market needs.
2. **Define** – framing the core challenge affecting cooperative competitiveness.
3. **Ideate** – brainstorming multiple solution
4. **Prototype** – sketching or mapping out potential solutions and,
5. **Testing**- Testing the created solution with the user.

This interactive process created space for shared learning, creativity, and cross-countries exchange.

4. Outcomes and Insights

Despite limited time, the groups generated a wide range of solutions and prototypes. Common ideas included:

- Leveraging **technology and mobile applications** to enhance member engagement, transparency, and market access.
- Promoting **youth inclusion** and digital literacy within cooperatives.
- Strengthening **value addition** and branding of cooperative products; and
- Enhancing **collaboration between cooperatives** across regions.

While not every group presented, the overall energy and participation demonstrated a strong appetite for innovation. Participants expressed appreciation for the Design Thinking approach, noting how it can be used to co-create solutions directly with users moving beyond theoretical discussion to practical, and actionable ideas.

5. Reflections and Next Steps

The session reaffirmed that cooperatives across Africa face similar challenges: market competition, governance, and generational transition, but also possess deep reservoirs of creativity and contextual knowledge.

Participants left with a clearer understanding of how Design Thinking can be embedded in their cooperative strategy, management practices, and member services.

ICA-A and partner organizations may consider follow-up sessions or localized workshops to deepen the application of Design Thinking within cooperative networks, allowing participants to refine and test the prototypes generated during this dash.

6. Conclusion

The Design Thinking training dash was a dynamic and insightful session that demonstrated the power of collaborative creativity. It showcased how African cooperatives can reimagine their competitiveness by centering the member experience, embracing experimentation, and co-creating change from within.

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